

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5963
INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
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AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CS
SUBJECT: COSTA RICAN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS: FACIO MOVES BOLDLY;
OPPOSITION SEARCHES FOR UNITY

REF: SAN JOSE A-110

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL GONZALO FACIO CHALLENGES A RIVAL TO A "PRE-PRIMARY" RUNOFF TO CLEAR THE DECK FOR THE GOVERNMENT PARTY TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A MODERATE (FACIO OR HERNAN GARRON) AND A CENTER/LEFTIST (LUIS ALBERTO MONGE) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES TBKSEARCH FOR UNITY. END SUMMARY.

2. EX FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALO FACIO ATTEMPTED TO STRIKE OUT SMARTLY IN HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY CAMPAIGN BY ISSUING A CHALLENGE TO FELLOW CANDIDATE EX MINAG HERNAN GARRON FOR A SPECIAL "PRE-PRIMARY"
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ELECTION IN EARLY JANUARY TO ELIMINATE ONE OF THE TWO FROM THE RACE. FACIO'S CHALLENGE, HE SAID IN A SPECIALLY CALLED PRESS CONFERENCE DEC .
16, STEMMED FROM GARRON'S VIEW THAT HIS AND FACIO'S CANDIDACIES APPEALED TO THE SAME CONSTITUENCY (WHICH OPPOSES CURRENT FRONT-RUNNER

LUIS ALBERTO MONGE IN THE GOVERNMENT PLN PARTY), AND THAT FACIO SHOULD HAVE NEVER ENTERED THE RACE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

3. FACIO'S NOTION OF A MINI-PRIMARY IN SEVEN RANDOMLY SELECTED ELECTORAL DISTRICTS IN SEVEN PROVINCES INCLUDED THE STIPULATION THAT THE LOSING CANDIDATE'S FORCES WOULD BE FREE TO SUPPORT EITHER OF THE THEN REMAINING TWO CANDIDATES. FACIO REASONED THAT REDUCING THE CANDIDATES FROM THREE TO THE TWO WHO ENJOY THE MOST POPULAR SUPPORT IN THE PARTY IS BENEFICIAL TO THE PARTY. (IT ALSO ENHANCES THE INFLUENCE OF JOSE FIGUERES, WHO IS STUMPING FOR FACIO.)

4. GARRON LOST NO TIME IN REJECTING THE FACIO PROPOSAL OUT OF HAND, WITH THE COMMENT THAT FACIO SEEMS TO BE CONFUSED AND BADLY ADVISED (READ BY JOSE FIGUERES AND HIS SUPPORTERS). TRUE TO HIS IMAGE OF AN ELDER, INDEPENDENT-MINDED POL, GARRON PUBLICLY RECOMMENDED YLCAT FACIO REMAIN CALM AND THAT THEY TEST FORCES IN THE ALREADY AGREED-UPON MARCH PRIMARY.

5. IN THE OPPOSITION THE FITS AND STARTS TO FIND A SINGLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CONTINUE. THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATE LINE-UP IS NOW THREE: CONGRESSMAN GUILLERMO VILABOS ARCE OF THE NATIONAL UNIFICATION CALDERONIST PARTY (PUN); TEXTILE MAGNATE MIGUEL BARZUNA, WHO ENJOYS THE SUPPORT OF THE OTHER SEGMENT OF THE CALDERONISTAS; AND EX-PLN LEADER AND OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE (1974) RODRIGO CARAZO. ONE OTHER PRE-CANDIDATE, JOSE HINE, HAS JOINED CARAZO. YET ANOTHER CALL FOR JUST ONE CANDIDATE WAS MADE DECEMBER 16 WITH A PUBLIC PLEA FROM INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION GROUPS LED BY OSCAR BARAHONA TO LEADERS IN THE THREE SECTORS TO UNITE. MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS ARE OF THE VIEW THAT THIS LATEST CALL FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNITY WILL BE AS FRUITLESS AS THE NUMEROUS PREVIOUS ONES.

6. COMMENT: KEEPING THE OPPOSITION DIVIDED HAS BEEN THE KEY TO THE GOVERNMENT PARTY PLN'S SUCCESS IN RECENT COSTA RICAN POLITICAL HISTORY. EMBASSY HAS IT FROM THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY IN THE PLN THAT VILLALOBOS ARCE WILL NOT GIVE UP HIS CANDIDACY (THE PUN HAS BEEN IN BED WITH THE PLN FOR YEARS NOW). WHETHER CARAZO OR BARZUNA IS THE CANDIDATE OF THE REST OF THE OPPOSITION IS TO BE DECIDED BY AN OPPOSITION PRIMARY IN EARLY MARCH. HOWEVER, WHETHER THE WINNERS WILL SUPPORT THE LOSERS AFTER THE PRIMARY -- THE SOLEMNLY AGREED UPON FORMULA--IS NOT AT ALL SURE.

7. GONZALO FACIO'S MOVE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED EITHER TO A FEELING OF DESPERATION HE HAS ABOUT HIS OWN CANDIDACY (HE IS CONSIDERED EITHER SECOND OR THIRD IN THE FIELD OF THREE) OR, AS EMBASSY HAS BEEN HEARING, BECAUSE FACIO HAS GROWN WEARY OF THE RACE. IT COULD BE A COMBINATION OF BOTH, PLUS SOME SAGE ADVICE FROM JOSE FIGUERES. RUMORS ARE ALSO HEARD THAT FACIO MAY STRIKE A DEAL WITH MONGE (THE

VICE-PRESIDENTIAL SLOT) OR WILL FUSE WITH GARRON. HOWEVER FACIO
PLAYS IT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE ONLY PLN HOPEFUL WHO
SEEMS TO BE PLAYING AROUND IS THE EX-FOREIGN MINISTER. GARRON IS
CALM. AND THE CONFIDENT LUIS ALBERTO MONGE HAS GIVEN HIS OWN
POLITICAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT TO COSTA RICA--HE HAS SUSPENDED HIS
CAMPAIGN UNTIL AFTER THE HOLIDAYS.
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